

**EARLY MILWAUKEE: PAPERS
FROM THE ARCHIVES
OF THE OLD SETTLERS' CLUB
OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649754274

Early Milwaukee: papers from the archives of the Old Settlers' Club of Milwaukee County by
Old Settlers' Club of Milwaukee County

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Cover @ 2017

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OLD SETTLERS' CLUB OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY

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HAMMERSMITH ENGRAVING CO.

MILWAUKEE IN 1848

FROM A PAINTING BY G. J. ROBERTSON

Early Milwaukee

Papers from the Archives of the
Old Settlers' Club of
Milwaukee County

Published by the Club

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

MILWAUKEE, MCMXVI

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Prefatory

The formal organization of the Old Settlers' Club of Milwaukee County dates from July 5, 1869. There had been a tentative organization before that time and no fewer than eighty persons—possibly more—had taken part in it. It possessed a written constitution. This appears from the following call which was published in the newspapers prior to the date set forth above:

"Old Settlers' Club.—There will be a meeting of the Old Settlers' Club of Milwaukee County, at the Court House, on Monday, July 5, 1869, at 11 o'clock A. M., for the purpose of electing officers and completing the organization of the club. All who have signed the constitution, and all others who settled in Milwaukee County previous to January, 1839, and desire to join the club, are requested to be present."

To this call were appended fourteen signatures, followed by the words "and sixty-six others." The fourteen were men still well remembered by the older residents of Milwaukee—Samuel Brown, Eliphalet Cramer, S. Pettibone, Harrison Ludington, Elisha Starr, J. A. Noonan, D. A. J. Upham, W. A. Prentiss, Fred Wardner, Levi Blossom, Horace Chase, George A. Trayser, Cyrus Hawley and Richard L. Edwards. The Court House in which they met was not the present building, but the historic structure on the same site, described in "McLeod's History of Wisconsin" as "a large and spacious building of finished workmanship," "built by Mr. Juneau in 1836, at a cost of six thousand dollars, which he gave to the county as a present, with two and a half acres of land." Adjoining it on the east was the old county jail, the scene in 1854 of the Glover rescue, one of the conspicuous incidents illustrating the conflict of sentiment on the subject of slavery which brought on the Civil War.

At the meeting in the old Court House Judge Andrew Galbraith Miller presided, and Fenimore Cooper Pomeroy acted as secretary, and the organization of the Old Settlers' Club of Milwaukee County was perfected. Its object, as set forth in the preamble to its constitution, was the reviving of old associations and the renew-

ing of the ties of former years. Under the constitution which it adopted any person of good moral character who had settled in Milwaukee County, as organized before January 1st, 1839, might become a member of the club by signing the constitution and paying the initiation fee and the annual dues.

Milwaukee County as organized before the 1st of January, 1839, comprised an expanse of territory which by comparison would make European principalities look small. The name was first used to describe a political division in 1834, two years before the erection of the territory of Wisconsin, and when what is now Wisconsin was part of the territory of Michigan. On September 6th of that year the Michigan territorial Legislature passed "an act to establish the Counties of Brown and Iowa, and to lay off the County of Milwaukee." The County of Milwaukee created by the act extended from the northern boundary of Illinois to about the present north line of Washington County, and west to a line that would include what are now known as Madison and Portage City.

Under this constitution the club flourished until 1881, the original organization of old settlers and pioneers, the only association of Milwaukeeans with the object of preserving the associations, the memories and the traditions of old Milwaukee. In that year it adopted an amendment to its constitution, with the object of making the organization perpetual. The resolution proposing this amendment was as follows:

"Resolved, That all male descendants of those who settled in Milwaukee County prior to January 1, 1843, of good moral character, upon attaining the age of 21 years and complying with the conditions of this constitution, shall be eligible to membership upon the recommendation of the executive committee."

Nearly coincident with this expansion of the scope of the Old Settlers' Club was the institution of another organization identified with the preservation of old associations pertaining to the settlement of Milwaukee—the Early Pioneer Association of Milwaukee County. This organization confined its standard of eligibility to male persons who had reached the age of fifty years prior to January 1, 1879, and were of good standing in the community and who had become residents of Milwaukee

County previous to January 1, 1844. A large number of the members of the Old Settlers' Club became members of the Pioneer Association. The membership of the Old Settlers' Club was for several years considerably reduced. But the spirit of the Old Settlers' Club was preserved in the Pioneer Association, and the Old Settlers' Club continued to exist. Moreover, a resolution of the Pioneer Association, adopted on January 1, 1880, the date of its organization, provided that its members should wear the badge of the Old Settlers' Club. The two organizations held their annual banquets together for several years—"twin cherries on a single stem." Their objects were identical, the only difference was in respect to the requirements for membership—the Pioneers restricted their membership to pioneers, and the time would arrive when an association of pioneers must become extinct. The Old Settlers aimed for perpetuity. They had planned an organization that should last as long as Milwaukee lasts, and that should carry on from generation to generation the traditions and memories which bind old Milwaukeeans together, and stimulate civic pride and incite civic patriotism.

From 1882 to 1889, inclusive, the annual banquets of the Old Settlers' Club and the Pioneer Association were held jointly, and the names of members of the respective organizations were printed on the menu cards. From the menu card for the banquet of February 22, 1882, it appears that the membership of the Old Settlers' Club had shriveled to fourteen, while the Pioneer Association at that time had fifty-two members. The number of living members of each of the clubs whose names were printed on succeeding banquet menu cards were as follows:

	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
Old Settlers	19	30	32	38	47	83	82
Pioneers	57	54	54	51	44	33	43

That the life of the Old Settlers' Club at one time seemed to tremble in the balance may be inferred from a newspaper report of the annual meeting of 1887, which states that Peter Van Vechten said he hoped the movement threatening to disorganize the Old Settlers' Club would not succeed, and that John A. Dadd said he hoped the term of residence making persons eligible as Old Settlers would be shortened to twenty-five years. "After some discussion,"

the report states, "a committee consisting of John G. Ogden, W. B. Miller and John A. Dadd was appointed to revise the constitution of the Old Settlers' Club." The incorporation of the Old Settlers' Club was effected on the 19th of September, 1887. The membership of the club has approximated five hundred for a number of years.

The rooms of the Old Settlers' Club, which since 1891 have been in the Loan and Trust building, contain an interesting and valuable collection of books, pictures and relics pertaining to the history of Milwaukee. Numerous additions have been made since the publication of the catalogue compiled by M. A. Boardman in 1895. Very useful for reference are the file of city directories and the collections of scrap books presented by James A. Buck and Peter Van Vechten, Jr. The Van Vechten scrap books are rich in biographical material relating to Milwaukee old settlers, and the information which they contain is made easily accessible by carefully compiled indexes. The pictures include photographs, paintings and prints of old-time Milwaukee buildings and several hundred portraits. The relics are of a wide variety, many of them vividly recalling the cruder conditions of living in former days.

The club rooms are open on week days, furnishing an agreeable place of resort for members. They are also the scene of the stated monthly meetings and the annual New Year's reception. At the New Year's reception of 1912 a committee, of which Jeremiah Quin was chairman and spokesman, presented a testimonial address to Frederick Layton, thanking him, in the name of the people of Milwaukee, for the Layton Art Gallery and the Layton Hospital for Incurables, erected and endowed by his generosity. The proceedings at this meeting were recorded by means of the phonograph and are preserved in the archives of the club, so that at some distant time it may be possible for later residents of Milwaukee to hear the voices of old settlers who expressed themselves on that occasion.

The annual banquets of the Old Settlers' Club have been given on Washington's Birthday since 1879. They have been held at different times at the Newhall House, the Kirby House, the Pfister Hotel, the Hotel Wisconsin, and the Plankinton House. These banquets have been the occasions of many noteworthy addresses and

have left a long train of pleasant memories. Another social feature of yearly occurrence is the annual basket picnic of Old Settlers and their families on the grounds of the National Soldiers' Home.

The Old Settlers' Club has been interested in the marking of historic sites by suitable tablets. It contributed to the erection of the memorial log cabin near the site of the old Jacques Vieau residence in Mitchell Park, which is not far from where the old Chicago and Green Bay trail crossed the Menomonee river. With the generous assistance of George W. Ogden it was instrumental in procuring the memorial recently erected for Professor I. A. Lapham in Lapham Park. Bronze tablets which it has affixed are located as follows: On the Milwaukee County court house, Jackson street, noting the sites of the old jail and court house; on the Pabst building, marking the site of the first house on the east side of the river, built by Solomon Juneau; on the Uiblein building, East Water street near Michigan, marking the birthplace of the first white child born in Milwaukee; on the First National Bank building, marking the birthplace of Milwaukee's first white boy.

Following is a list of the officers of the Old Settlers' Club for every year since its organization:

1869.

President, Horace Chase; vice-presidents, Samuel Brown, George Bowman and Enoch Chase; secretary, Fenimore C. Pomeroy; treasurer, Clark Shephardson.

1870.

President, Samuel Brown; vice-presidents, George Bowman, Enoch Chase and William A. Prentiss; secretary, Fenimore C. Pomeroy; treasurer, Fred Wardner; marshal, James S. Buck.

1871.

President, Enoch Chase; vice-presidents, Henry Miller, George Bowman and William A. Prentiss; secretary, John M. Miller; treasurer, Frederick Wardner; marshal, James S. Buck.

1872.

President, Andrew G. Miller; vice-presidents, William A. Prentiss, John Crawford and George Abert; secretary, John M. Miller; treasurer, Fred Wardner; marshal, James S. Buck.